

## Locking the Univocal Meaning: Communication Circuits and the Panoptic Apparatus of the Visualized Qur'an on YouTube

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### Abstract

This study addresses the global theoretical debate on digital religion by examining how cyber-mediatization reshapes the authority of scriptural interpretation. While media studies portray the digital spaces as decentralizing religious meaning through flexible platforms, this article demonstrates an empirical shift toward a mechanical, doctrinal rigidity. Employing a descriptive-analytical case study design based on communication diagrams, this research analyzes the audiovisual corpus of murottals of QS. al-Baqarah, Ali 'Imrān, and al-Wāqī'ah on the YouTube channel @TheProphetsPath. The findings reveal a profound closure of meaning, wherein the complexity of legal verses and the realm of pure eschatology are aesthetically domesticated through the unification of Arabized iconography and computer-generated graphic manipulation. Rather than dissolving orthodoxy, the audience's sensory responses in the comments section function as a feedback loop that reinforces visual dominance. This study offers a novel theoretical contribution to the understanding of shallow religion, positioning mass communication platforms as panoptic apparatuses that lock univocal interpretations onto the screen.

**Keywords:** *Mediatization of Religion; Communication Circuit; Shallow Religion; Closure of Meaning; Digital Murottal.*

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## Introduction

The development of media as a mediation tool for religion—which has long been regarded as an agent of extreme secularization that erodes its sacredness through the superficiality of visual reproduction<sup>1</sup>—actually reveals the opposite empirical reality in the

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Helland, "Ritual," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (London: Routledge, 2013), 33.



contemporary digital ecosystem. Under the control of platform algorithms, the circulation of popular images no longer functions as an empty simulation that dissolves doctrinal authority. Instead, it transforms into a powerful instrument of meaning closure. Theological doctrines that were once flexible and demanded deep inner contemplation are now aesthetically tamed through gadget screens, converted into daily practical instructions that constrain the imaginative freedom of urban audiences.<sup>2</sup> The ontological blurring of the sacred and the profane through the unification of signs has failed to decentralize the meaning of scripture. Rather, it reconstructs a new model of visual orthodoxy that operates mechanically. The failure of mainstream literature to capture the disciplinary dimensions of visual banality that leaves a critical academic gap concerning how the authority of spirituality is being redefined today through the optical tyranny of digital devices.

In the context of this global debate, the YouTube channel @TheProphetsPath serves as an empirical case illustrating a radical transformation in the mechanization of Qur'anic interpretation. Through visual curation based on mimetic assembly, the platform functions as a fixed space of meaning where metaphysical texts are subordinated to the platform's technical and algorithmic imperatives. Content circulation is no longer experienced as an elastic, contemplative medium but is consumed instantly as a rigid, standardized visual stimulus on the device screen.<sup>3</sup> Examining this specific case is essential for addressing academic gaps overlooked by conventional media sociology. This study reveals how the mediatization of cyber mass communication has succeeded in constructing a discursive closure that reduces the theological complexity of divine revelation to a single, well-established visual dogma in contemporary cyberspace.

Research on the digital transmission of the Qur'an has sought to map this transformation, yet its focus remains largely confined to audio functionality and pragmatic reception. Earlier studies primarily examined the mechanical use of murattal recordings as cognitive tools to accelerate the memorization of sacred texts.<sup>4</sup> With the rise of cyber platforms, scholarly attention has shifted toward "dawahtainment" formats, analyzing how

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<sup>2</sup> Stig Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 2013), 90.

<sup>3</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath], "Al Imran Family (Family of Imran) - Soothing Quran Recitation," YouTube, September 21, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jX\\_ubxqF1Cw&list=PLK1Gapddj-lVM8UsHULq0\\_sU7z0WpUxry&index=3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jX_ubxqF1Cw&list=PLK1Gapddj-lVM8UsHULq0_sU7z0WpUxry&index=3).

<sup>4</sup> Susi Safitri, Mahmeed Alii, and Omar Mahmud, "Murottal Audio as a Medium for Memorizing the Qur'an in Super-Active Children," *Journal International Inspire Education Technology* 1, no. 2 (August 14, 2022): 111-24, <https://doi.org/10.55849/jiiet.v1i2.87>.

Qur'anic verses are packaged in pop-cultural styles to engage younger audiences.<sup>5</sup> At a more critical level, this phenomenon has been interpreted as a form of cyber-aesthetic reception, where the audio-visual presentation of the Qur'an serves as a space for negotiating urban pious identity<sup>6</sup> and as an internet commodity<sup>7</sup> that satisfies digital viewers' religious narcissism. However, these research trajectories remain confined within the dichotomy of cultural commodification and psycho-practical impacts. Mainstream studies have failed to capture how digital visualization functions aggressively as an ideological apparatus that fixes the meaning of sacred texts. This conceptual limitation motivates the present investigation, which examines how visual synchronization on digital platforms restricts the interpretive flexibility of Qur'anic verses through the murattal content of the YouTube channel @TheProphetsPath.

Building on these conceptual shortcomings, this research aims to systematically dismantle the triad of visual operational mechanisms underpinning the institutionalization of contemporary banal religion in cyberspace. To achieve this, the study investigates three primary layers in the murattal content of @TheProphetsPath. First, it analyzes the anatomy of the audience's sensory-biological domestication through audiovisual temporal synchronization, which reduces the contemplative depth of the Qur'an to the optical precision of the device. Second, it traces the operation of cyber identity politics via a homogeneous visual Arabization project and binary contrast schemes that freeze the interpretive elasticity of legal verses. Third, it dissects the crisis of eschatological representation in the metaphysical domain—specifically, the tension between non-mimetic creeds and the platform's desacralized cinematic graphic effects. Through this exploration, the study demonstrates how cyberspace reasserts theological authority through the tyranny of digital screens.

This study argues that the visual synchronization in the content of the YouTube channel @TheProphetsPath is not merely a passive aesthetic background but rather a strategic ideological apparatus that establishes a regime of visual truth. This apparatus

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<sup>5</sup> Rasidin Rasidin et al., "Quranic Interpretation on Instagram: The Shift from Traditional to Digital Platforms in Indonesia," *TAJDID: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 24, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 376–406, <https://doi.org/10.30631/tjd.v24i1.642>.

<sup>6</sup> 'Ainatu Masrurin, "Murattal Dan Mujawwad Al-Qur'an Di Media Sosial," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 19, no. 2 (2019): 188–202, <https://doi.org/10.14421/QH.2018.1902-04>.

<sup>7</sup> Rizal Faturhman Purnama, "The Aesthetic Reception of the Quran in Instagram: Variations, Factors, and Religious Commodification," *ULUL ALBAB Jurnal Studi Islam* 21, no. 2 (December 29, 2020): 237–68, <https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v21i2.9528>.

freezes the interpretive flexibility of the Qur'an within contemporary digital spaces. The rigid articulation of signs during the stage of industrial circulation is deliberately constructed to impose a single, hegemonic reading, while eliminating the semantic ambiguity inherent in a transcendent text open to multiple interpretations.<sup>8</sup> The central claim of this study is that various audience responses—including expressions of theological resistance in the comments section—fail to dissolve this new orthodoxy. On the contrary, the mechanical engagement of urban audiences' sensory responses functions as a feedback loop that reinforces and perpetuates the continuity of rigid visual production circuits in the new media era.

## Method

This qualitative study employs a descriptive-analytical case study design, utilizing Stuart Hall's communication circuit model to examine the encoding-decoding processes of religious cyber media. The YouTube channel @TheProphetsPath was selected as the empirical focus due to its institutional significance as a leading global producer of contemporary cyber preaching that consistently reconstructs sacred texts through rich visual landscapes. Purposive sampling<sup>9</sup> was applied to limit the data to the QS. al-Baqarah, Ali 'Imrān, and al-Wāqī'ah. This selection ensures a variety of hybrid theological content representing legal verses, historical narratives, and pure eschatology. The primary data sources consist of secondary audiovisual materials, including murattal videos, expository subtitles, and netizen comments, which together form a textual database for analyzing digital audience reception.

The operational mechanism of this method involves the systematic deconstruction of spatial framing techniques and visual temporality that spatially compress religious doctrine. Data collection was conducted through participatory digital observation, including sequential searches, screen-capture documentation, and timestamp-based audiovisual transcription. All visual elements—such as clinical anatomical modeling, polarized lighting, universal symbols, and computer graphic manipulation—were systematically documented in the data corpus. Data analysis employs multimedia semiotic

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<sup>8</sup> Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 24–26.

<sup>9</sup> W John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative Adn Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage Publication Inc., 2014), 166.

techniques<sup>10</sup> and Stuart Hall's reception analysis through three procedural stages<sup>11</sup>: (1) reduction of the visual corpus data, (2) presentation of the data in a matrix combining visual-atmospheric sensory tables with verbatim commentary texts, and (3) theoretical conclusion drawing to identify patterns of hybridization and negotiation of religious authority in cyberspace.

### **The @TheProphetsPath as a Virtual Space for Mediatized Qur'anic Recitation: Mapping the Audiovisual Production**

The internal linguistic features of the Qur'an inherently shape the reader's cognitive framework by distinguishing the textual forms used to present legal verses, historical narratives, and purely eschatological depictions of the afterlife. In the domain of legal verses, the sacred text employs rigid affirmative particles to delineate the boundaries of orthodox social behavior while establishing theological sanctions grounded in worldly authority.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, the realm of prophetic historical stories is constructed through dramatic, chronological narratives of miracles and upheavals involving past prophets, providing concrete examples of moral conduct.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the purely eschatological dimension of the afterlife is conveyed through abstract metaphysical descriptions of apocalyptic shocks and supernatural transcendent realms that exceed the limits of human mimetic imagination. This multi-layered interpretive structure demands the preservation of strict sanctity of meaning through traditional orthodox rules, ensuring that interpretive flexibility does not devolve into reductive materialism.

Cybermedia interventions have transformed the landscape of religious authority through the process of religious mediatization, turning sacred texts into objects of digital popular culture consumption. In religion and media studies, digital platforms function not merely as passive transmission channels but as active agents that reshape how modern societies understand and internalize sacred doctrines.<sup>14</sup> The necessity for religious texts to

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis (a Source Book of New Methods)* (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1984), 10–12.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79*, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (London: University of Birmingham, 2005), 128–38.

<sup>12</sup> Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Aẓīm Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil Al-'Irfān*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 122.

<sup>13</sup> 'Abd al-Karīm Al-Khaṭīb, *Al-Qaṣaṣ Al-Qur'ānī Fī Maṭṭūqah Wa Mafhūmihi* (Bairūt: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1975), 44.

<sup>14</sup> Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change," *Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no. 1 (June 2008): 9–26, [https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.6.1.9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.6.1.9_1).

engage with the logic of new media has given rise to remediation,<sup>15</sup> wherein sacred-profane boundaries dissolve within global communication circuits. Consequently, the authority of conventional (elitist and text-centered) religious interpretation has become fragmented by new digital actors. These cyber content producers re-engineer sacred scriptural narratives into contemporary symbolic forms, adapting transcendental messages to the digital habitus and sensory preferences of urban audiences who navigate fluidly across cultural boundaries.

This convergence is reinforced by the technical infrastructure of digital platforms, which demands high-definition visual satisfaction and thereby intensifies the aesthetic imperative to visualize the meaning of sacred texts. The algorithmic logic of new media—exemplified by YouTube’s recommendation system—pressures producers to create content that instantly captures viewers’ sensory attention through cinematic computer graphics.<sup>16</sup> As a result, abstract metaphysical teachings are condensed into physical spatial icons, clinical anatomical models, binary lighting contrasts, and universal visual conventions to facilitate cognitive comprehension.<sup>17</sup> However, this digital-economic imperative traps the sacred text in the paradox of the culture industry: while visualization enables the educative and performative-curative internalization of the recited text in real time, it also risks domesticating the supernatural dimension of the afterlife into a desacralized spectacle commodity.

Within the context of cyber tension, the YouTube channel @TheProphetsPath serves as a strategic research locus, embodying the hybrid dynamics of contemporary global digital preaching. Platform analytics reveal a vast audience base, with over 2.47 million subscribers. Its significance as a leading producer of urban da‘wah content is further demonstrated by its prolific output of 884 high-resolution murottal videos. This substantial capacity for disseminating theological messages makes the channel an ideal site for examining how producers’ visual encoding strategies aim to fulfill audiences’ spiritual longings while simultaneously provoking ideological contestation, critical interpretations, and oppositional responses in the comments section.

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<sup>15</sup> Jay D. Bolter and Richard A. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 44–45.

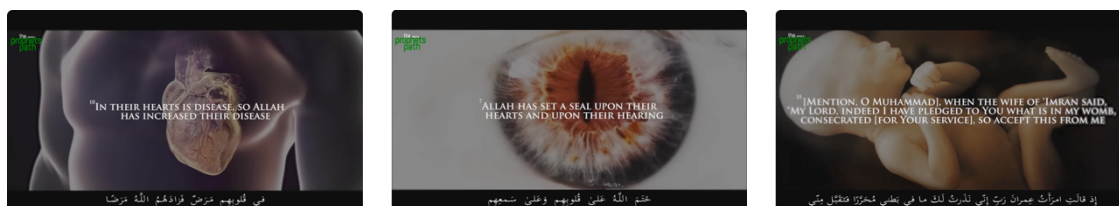
<sup>16</sup> Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 41.

<sup>17</sup> Mia Lövhelm, “Identity,” in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (Routledge, 2013), 51–52.

## Remediation of Biological Anatomy: Mediatization of Human Physical Characteristics in the Visual Exegesis of the Qur'anic Text

The process of constructing meaning that connect the textual features of revelation with the penetration of digital visual infrastructure transforms the transcendent expression of scripture into technical encoding decisions within the cyber production circuit of the @TheProphetsPath channel. Under the imperatives of platform capitalism—which demands the continuous satisfaction of urban viewers' sensory desires<sup>18</sup>—previously abstract religious texts are constrained by the rigid, mechanically structured visualization regime of YouTube. This transformation operates systematically through a series of symbolic aesthetic codes that radically contain the infinite meanings of the text within the spatial and physical boundaries of the digital screen.<sup>19</sup> This doctrinal solidification occurs cumulatively, with the placement of bodily anatomy, binary polarization, and pure metaphysical transmutation serving as initial entry points to trace how the authority of sacred texts is negotiated in cyberspace.

The consolidation of theological doctrine within digital communication circuits also occurs place through the placement of vital anatomical symbols and representations as visual nodes that frame religious verses. At the beginning of the video, the visual emphasis on the human body's higher organs—for example, the modeling of the biological heart, the macrostructure of the sense of sight, and the clinical fetal growth phase—is temporally aligned the chanting of verses from QS. al-Baqarah and the story in QS. Āli ʿImrān (see Figure 1).



Source: YouTube @TheProphetsPath (2026)

**Figure 1.** Anatomical model representing human biological organs.

<sup>18</sup> Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 44.

<sup>19</sup> Massimiliano Panarari and Guido Gili, “Spiritual Technologies: The Religious Symbolism of the Digital Universe,” *Religions* 15, no. 11 (October 29, 2024): 1320, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111320>.

Figure 1 illustrates a real pulsating heart organ complete with detailed blood vessels during the recitation of QS. al-Baqarah [2]:10,<sup>20</sup> the macrostructure of the human eyeball, featuring dramatic brown and white irises, during the recitation of QS. al-Baqarah [2]:7,<sup>21</sup> and the appearance of a baby in the womb during the recitation of QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:35<sup>22</sup>. These images demonstrate that physical organs function as condensing icons, serving as markers of abstract metaphysical teachings that are not conveyed verbally but are instead recognized through sensory, material forms. In this way, the meaning of sacred texts is absorbed into objects and visual temporality, allowing spiritual illnesses and prophetic miracles to manifest spatially in anatomical forms.

The spatialization of meaning in the visual representation of macro anatomy is further emphasized through fragments of human body movement presented as physical religious markers, without revealing the faces of sacred figures. In the sequence depicting the Prophet’s story in QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:67, Ibrāhīm’s prophetic agency is partially conveyed through the image of a human palm turned upward, illuminated by a beam of light shining from behind.<sup>23</sup> The same motif is used to visualize the concept of *ḥanīf* (true believer) through the bowing movement of a man wearing a turban. This faceless, body-framing approach is also applied to depict Maryam in QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:42, shown as the silhouette of a woman in a long black hijab standing with her back to the camera (a back-facing shot) and facing the vast ocean, as well as through the gesture of her sitting alone in contemplation behind dimly lit window curtains, illustrating QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:43.<sup>24</sup>

The circulation of physical data is then empirically responded to by the audience through a reception pattern that emphasizes practical usefulness and monitors the accuracy of the text. Muslim audiences predominantly exhibit a dominant-hegemonic acceptance, positioning this visual anatomical modeling as a tool to aid memorization, which in turn enhances their spatial cognition. As one user expressed, “Listening to Surah Baqarah with this visualization along with memorization has never been easier [heart symbol] — calming and soothing to the heart” (@so\*\*ier\_\*568, 2026). However, the presentation of these physical details also prompts critical reading from a negotiating

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<sup>20</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath], “The Most Heart Touching Recitation of Surah Baqarah,” YouTube, September 14, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQNeg2S\\_tcc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQNeg2S_tcc).

<sup>21</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath].

<sup>22</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath], “Al Imran Family (Family of Imran) - Soothing Quran Recitation.”

<sup>23</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath].

<sup>24</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath].

stance, where the audience is no longer passive but actively applies traditional tajwid knowledge to identify inaccuracies in pronunciation.

On a quick note, a mistake occurred when reciting verse 284 at 02:04:36: the word *tubdu* has a sukun on the *ba'*, but it was recited with a kasrah. Barak Allahu Feekum for this awesome recitation and the visualization, Ikhwan (@moha\*\*\*dodah4274, 2026).

Thus, the comments section and the visuals serve as perceptual triggers that guide the audience to interpret the reading of the Qur'an within the framework of traditional beliefs, which mutually reinforce one another in real time.

This theological reflection on visual materialization reveals a fundamental epistemological shift from textual-metaphorical interpretive reasoning (*ta'wīl*) to a mimetic-literal meaning framework characterized by an anthropomorphic pattern. Subordinating the meanings of *qulūbihim* (QS. al-Baqarah [2]:10) and *sam'ihim* (QS. al-Baqarah [2]:7) to the form of a three-dimensional clinical organ neglects the esoteric dimension concerning the closure of spiritual truth<sup>25</sup> and doubt (*sakk wa nifāq*)<sup>26</sup>, reducing it instead to mere biological anatomical dysfunction. The most acute epistemological collapse is evident in the domestication of the transcendental event of the Ascension of the Prophet Isa (QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:55) through the visualization of concrete stairs and a pair of giant hands. This approach radically confines the viewer's understanding within a digital *tajsim* (anthropomorphism) fixation that violates the principle of divine transcendence (*tanzīh*).<sup>27</sup> By visualizing what should remain abstract and esoteric, this popular cyber industry enforces a taming of the Qur'an's metaphorical structure in pursuit of sensory stimulation for urban audiences—a visual leap that breaks the bounds of traditional classical exegetical orthodoxy.

The shift from textual interpretation (*ta'wīl*) to literal-anthropomorphic fixation does not occur in isolation; it is strictly conditioned by the deterministic nature of new media technological infrastructure. In the contemporary landscape of religious mediatization, the assembly of visual images must conform to the technical regulations imposed by platform algorithms, which require high resolution to maintain the continuous

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<sup>25</sup> Muḥammad bin Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān Fī Ta'wīl Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1 (Bayrūt: Muassasah al-Risālah, 2000), 258.

<sup>26</sup> 'Abd Allah bin Aḥmad Al-Nasafī, *Madārik Al-Tanzīl Wa Ḥaqā'iq Al-Ta'wīl*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kalm aṭ-Ṭīb, 1998), 49.

<sup>27</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *Asās Al-Taqdīs* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyah, 2001), 82.

circulation of viewers' attention.<sup>28</sup> Through Stuart Hall's communication circuit framework, cyber content producers carry out the encoding process by fully exploiting the mechanical capabilities of devices to translate abstract metaphysical texts into visible, material forms.<sup>29</sup> This infrastructural imperative to provide a definitive viewing object compels the ambiguity of the text's meaning to extend beyond the boundaries of traditional faith, reshaping it into a commercial platform visualization regime that epistemologically diminishes the theological depth of the Qur'an.

The pattern of assembling visual elements that are temporally synchronized with the verse chanting sequence demonstrates that mimetic representation serves as a material anchor, restraining the boundlessness of the cyber audience's imagination. When the theological text is concretely modeled at the exact moment the audio is recited, a perceptual fixation occurs, bridging the gap between the sacred text and mortal physical reality. This synchronization bypasses the audience's inner contemplation by compelling consciousness to directly associate metaphysical sanctions or esoteric descriptions with empirical, visible object markers.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, this mediatization transforms the Qur'an from a text that demands active spiritual and metaphorical interpretation into a mechanical visual stimulus-response mechanism. The audience's reception pattern, which regards these visual products as technical aids, confirms that the cinematic apparatus has succeeded in reducing the depth of theological doctrine to mere daily spatial cognition, where faith is no longer driven by the exploration of inner meaning but is controlled by optical precision on the gadget screen.

This acute reliance on optical precision, in turn, facilitates the institutionalization of banal religion, as outlined in Stig Hjarvard's argument. Through this mechanical construction, religious symbols that were originally sacred, elitist, and exclusive are transformed by media logic into everyday commodities—widespread, visible, and banal in public spaces.<sup>31</sup> The visualization of verses from the Qur'an no longer functions as a transcendental medium fostering spiritual depth;<sup>32</sup> instead, it has diminished into a

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<sup>28</sup> Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 54–56; Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change."

<sup>29</sup> Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 324.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila F. Glaser (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 30.

<sup>31</sup> Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*, 90.

<sup>32</sup> Harry Febrian, "Visualizing Authority: Rise of the Religious Influencers on the Instagram," *Social Media + Society* 10, no. 4 (October 6, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241286850>; Md. Sayeed Al-Zaman, "Social

background element embedded in urban gadget pop culture. However, whereas previous studies have shown banal religion tending to attach itself to secular institutional spaces or fictional products on the big screen,<sup>33</sup> the findings of this research expand the theory's scope by demonstrating that religious banality is actually produced massively and deliberately from within the heart of the cyber da'wah ecosystem itself. Consequently, these visual products do not merely facilitate superficial religious consumption; they establish a new form of visual orthodoxy that conditions audiences to believe instantly, without needing to engage with the complexities of traditional theological dialectics.

### **The Visual Arabization of Cyberspace: Global Contextual Iconographic Codes and the Binary Polarization of Islamic Law**

This banal optical gaze not only domesticates human biological expression but also demands a more radical system of visual categorization to instantly regulate the morality of urban viewers. The platform logic that prioritizes visualization compels cyber producers not only to reduce the meaning of text to physical objects but also to construct new spatial codes that sharply separate sacred from profane realms.<sup>34</sup> This transmutation—from the superficiality of meaning to global-scale visual standardization—triggers the unification of certain cultural identities in digital space. Consequently, the inherent flexibility of sacred texts, which originally relied on the richness of their textual polysemy, is now constrained by geometric markers and singular geographic mapping—a process of binary cultural sign regulation.

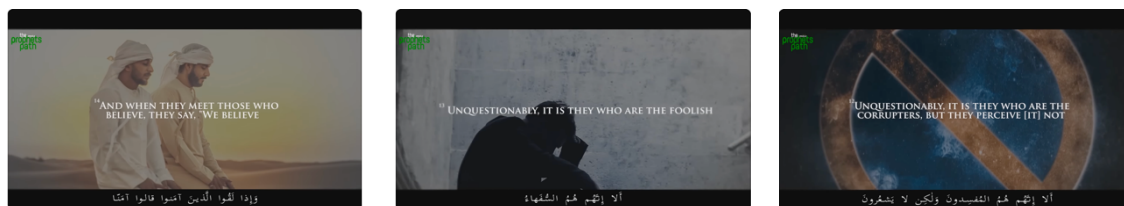
The portrayal of theological characters in cyberspace is strictly controlled by producers through signifying schemes based on a binary aesthetic contrast between glory and decline. Within the narrative rhythm of the video, this moral dichotomy is emphasized to the extreme to delineate the mental map of the ideal believer's identity, which is directly contrasted with the depiction of the hypocrite and the symbol of universal prohibition (see Figure 2).

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Mediatization of Religion: Islamic Videos on YouTube," *Heliyon* 8, no. 3 (March 2022): e09083, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e09083>.

<sup>33</sup> Tomas Axelson, "Vernacular Meaning Making," *Nordicom Review* 36, no. 2 (October 1, 2015): 143–56, <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2015-0022>; Yearry Panji Setianto, "Mediatization of Indonesian Islam: A Historical Examination of Media and Religious Change," *Religions* 17, no. 2 (January 30, 2026): 170, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel17020170>.

<sup>34</sup> David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 116.



Source: YouTube @TheProphetsPath (2026)

**Figure 2.** Binary aesthetic polarization model and global iconographic codes.

In this cyber morality coding segment (Figure 2), a dark, gloomy color scheme (low-key lighting) features the silhouette of a man holding his head—referencing the character of the fool (*al-sufahā'*) among the hypocrites—immediately following the audio statement, “*Alā innahum hum al-sufahā'*” (Unquestionably, it is they who are the foolish).” This is abruptly contrasted by a bright image with distant lights illuminating two men in formal white robes (*thobes*) and turbans, depicted with calm, humble gestures, accompanied by the recitation of QS. al-Baqarah [2]:14.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, geometric circular signs with red diagonal lines appear aggressively at the moment the audio reaches the affirmative particle *alā* in QS. al-Baqarah [2]:12,<sup>36</sup> emphasizing the boundaries of legal prohibition. In this way, the encoding structure is deliberately designed to eliminate the plurality of global Islamic cultural expressions and replace it with a project of “visual Arabization” and rigid daily instructions that restrict the interpretive flexibility of the verses.

Binary polarization through lighting manipulation extends to macro-scale background color processing, distinguishing the torment of doom from the reward of heaven across different texts. In the visuals accompanying the recitation of QS. al-Baqarah [2]:7 and [2]:10,<sup>37</sup> the theological sanctions of hell are depicted through a graphic sequence of mimetic flames in deep orange-brown hues that enclose the silhouette of a human body within a dark room. Uniquely, this orange-brown color gradation is reused by the producers with an opposite function in the narrative of QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:57,<sup>38</sup> where a golden glow illuminates a sequence of shady tree trunks with falling golden leaves amid green meadows. The same palette reappears in the landscape of giant waterfalls cutting through lush green cliffs in QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:136 to symbolize the beauty of heaven.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath], “The Most Heart Touching Recitation of Surah Baqarah.”

<sup>36</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath].

<sup>37</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath].

<sup>38</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath], “Al Imran Family (Family of Imran) - Soothing Quran Recitation.”

<sup>39</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath].

This rigid construction of binary signs not only captures audience attention but also provokes ideological resistance regarding the commercialization of sacred religious spaces. The aesthetic splendor of the desert scenery and the exceptional length of the video succeeded in engaging non-Muslim viewers, many of whom expressed surprise at the extended duration of the digital Qur'anic text. One comment read: "I am not a Muslim, but I learned that Surah al-Baqarah is the longest chapter, and I am shocked that Surah al-Baqarah was 2 hours long when recited! I am shocked!" (@meh\*\*\*nnie3059, 2026). However, when universal prohibition symbols and panic-laden depictions of doom are juxtaposed with the economic operations of new media, audiences quickly adopt an oppositional stance. They reject the intrusion of platform commercial advertising into the recitation of religious verses, as reflected in this comment: "You are putting ads on this video, why, I just want to listen to the Koran. Even when it comes to religion people are selfish, *istaghfirullah*" (@zesty\*\*\*ith5775, 2026). The comments section thus becomes an arena of active theological resistance against the market penetration of the digital economy, which threatens to erode the ritual dimension of pure Qur'anic spirituality.

This rigid aesthetic contrast reinforces the unification of a singular religious and cultural identity in cyberspace, thereby eroding the plurality of global Islamic expressions. The project of "visual Arabization"—manifested through uniform representations of clothing and cyber-spatial arrangements—constitutes a form of cultural essentialism that disregards the local contexts of diverse audiences. From a classical theological perspective, the laws of the Qur'an were revealed with consideration for flexible sociological benefits (*maṣlaḥah*) and the diversity of cultural backgrounds among Muslims.<sup>40</sup> However, when the ethical instructions of the holy book are framed by homogeneous and rigid cultural markers, the Qur'anic text ceases to function as a universal moral guide that transcends geographical boundaries. Instead, it shrinks into a symbol of identity for specific geopolitical groups. Furthermore, reducing Islamic law to a cinematic black-and-white opposition uproots traditional jurisprudential reasoning from its elastic, dialectical roots and transforms it into visual dogma that compels audiences to obey without engaging in any in-depth process of legal reasoning (*istinbāt al-ḥukm*).

This visual uniformity is driven by the political economy of capitalist platforms, which demands content standardization to instantly reach the global consumer market. Homogeneous cultural iconography is deliberately exploited by cyber producers as a content marketing strategy, enabling digital da'wah products to be consumed en masse

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<sup>40</sup> Ibrāhīm bin Mūsā Al-Syāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt*, vol. 3 (Khabar: Dār Ibn Affān, 1997), 88.

worldwide without language barriers. Here, mediatization is no longer merely about domesticating texts but about commodifying the ritual space itself.<sup>41</sup> The domestication of this space ultimately reveals the contradictory nature of platform capitalism: on the one hand, new media provides a digital sacred space for urban publics to consume spirituality;<sup>42</sup> on the other, its infrastructure aggressively intervenes in this sacred ritual through the penetration of commercial advertising. This reality shifts the audience's position. They are no longer passive in banal visual obedience but instead activate their critical agency to renegotiate the boundaries between the sanctity of worship and the exploitation of the cyber market economy.

The operationalization of standardized and fixed visual markers through this binary polarization scheme functions as a discursive stability strategy for the cyber industry, facilitating the mass production of certainty in meaning. As the metaphor-rich text of the Qur'an is compelled to conform to rigid global iconographic codes, production circuits enforce a regime that close off interpretive possibility. This process creates standardized content optimized for the rapid pace of digital consumption.<sup>43</sup> Audience responses—whether expressions of surprise at the video's length or theological discomfort in the comments section—serve latently as circuit maintainers. They confirm that the visual product effectively projects hegemonic authority and sustains continuous engagement. Thus, this visual unification operates as a cinematic apparatus that tames the inherent elasticity of revelation into a stable, uniform, and continuously reproduced optical dogma, free from the interruptions of theological doubt.

This unified visual framework offers a critical perspective that challenges the optimism prevalent in media studies, which often portrays cyberspace as an arena that inherently fosters the decentralization of meaning and the democratization of religious authority.<sup>44</sup> In reality, mediatization through rigid visual markers actually drives the centralization and fixation of theological meaning in order to sustain the continuity of the digital preaching industry. Moreover, while the claim that banal religion leads to the decay

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<sup>41</sup> David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995), 119.

<sup>42</sup> Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2006), 12.

<sup>43</sup> Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 131–32.

<sup>44</sup> Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, "Redefining Muslim Publics," in *New Media in The Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Stig Hjarvard, "Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion," in *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives*, ed. Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lövheim (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2012).

of sacred values is typically attributed to the random dissolution of religious symbols into secular media logic,<sup>45</sup> the current phenomenon expands this theory. It demonstrates that banality and uniformity of meaning are, in fact, deliberately designed in a strict, structured manner from within the cyber production centers themselves. Ultimately, audience involvement does not alter the direction of production; rather, it serves as a feedback loop that further entrenches this new visual orthodoxy in the new media era.

### **The Ambiguity of Cyber Eschatology: The Conflict Between Cinematic Effects and Abstract Aesthetics in Metaphysical Representation**

The discursive stability and visual orthodoxy established within the digital da'wah industry face their most significant theological challenge when engaging with the eschatological narratives of the Qur'an. While cyber producers tend to stabilize meaning in the realm of legal morality through uniform iconographic markers, cyberspace becomes a site of ambiguous aesthetic contestation when attempting to materialize eschatological realms. The demands of a visual-technological infrastructure grounded in high-resolution imagery directly conflict with traditional theological restrictions on the visual representation of transcendent realities, while simultaneously responding to the industrial imperative to produce spectacular cinematic experiences.<sup>46</sup> This epistemological tension—between preserving the abstractness of the metaphysical realm and adhering to the logic of material representation—creates a division in the visual styles of digital interpretation.

The material representation of religious meaning in cyberspace, particularly within the realm of pure eschatology, reveals a persistent pattern of ambiguity shaped by the technical affordances of digital platforms. Within YouTube's architecture, which prioritizes high-definition visual gratification, representations of transcendent realities oscillate between non-mimetic adherence to theological orthodoxy and the concrete domestication of metaphysical concepts through the visual language of science fiction cinema (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Metaphysical Eschatological Transmutation Model

Cluster Data	Textual Expository	Visual Realization and Sensory Atmosphere
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<sup>45</sup> Ismaael AlMazaedh et al., "Digital Religion in Platform Societies: Authority, Mediation, and Social Cohesion in Algorithmic Publics (2010–2025)," *Frontiers in Sociology* 11 (April 17, 2026), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2026.1802281>.

<sup>46</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 50–51.

Abstract Occult	<p><i>Wa al-sabiqūn al-sabiqūn, ulāika al-muqarrabūn, fī Jannat al-na‘īm</i></p> <p>“And the foremost, the foremost. Those are the ones brought nearest to God, in the Gardens of Bliss” (QS. al-Wāqī‘ah [56]:10–12).</p>	<p>A minimalist, symmetrical fractal silhouette emits light against a faded orange background, devoid of any earthly objects.</p>
	<p><i>Izā rujjat al-arḍ rajjā, wa bussat al-jibāl bassā</i></p> <p>“When the earth is shaken violently and the mountains are reduced to dust” (QS. al-Wāqī‘ah [56]:4–5).</p> <p><i>Fī samūm wa ḥamīm, wa zillīn min yaḥmūm</i></p> <p>“They will dwell amid scorching wind and scalding water, in the shade of black smoke” (QS. al-Wāqī‘ah [56]:42–43).</p>	<p>A gloomy, purple-gray, circular geometric fractal pattern radiates dynamically, synchronized with the audio frequencies.</p> <p>Dull brown streaks of light are accompanied by gloomy bluish-green flashes of lightning against a black background.</p>
Worldly Mimetics	<p><i>Wa jannāt tajrī min taḥtihā al-anhār</i></p> <p>“And gardens beneath which rivers flow” (QS. Āl ‘Imrān [3]:136).</p> <p><i>Innī mutawaffika war āfi‘uka ilayya wa muṭahhiruka</i></p> <p>“Indeed, I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify you” (QS. Āl ‘Imrān [3]:55).</p>	<p>The silhouette of a man stretches out both arms toward a realistic waterfall, expressing freedom and serenity.</p> <p>White, physical stairs ascend through ephemeral clouds, while a pair of giant hands embraces a radiant glow.</p>

Within this metaphysical mode of afterlife representation, a somber purple-gray circular geometric fractal pattern is employed to depict the cataclysmic event described in QS. al-Wāqī‘ah [56]:4–5,<sup>47</sup> reflecting an effort to uphold the theological principle of *bilā kayf* by avoiding concrete visualization. Similarly, the emission of minimalist symmetrical fractal silhouettes against an orange background accompanies the recitation of “And the foremost, the foremost...” (QS. al-Wāqī‘ah [56]:10–12),<sup>48</sup> preserving a non-representational aesthetic. However, this doctrinal commitment to the unseen (*sam‘iyyāt*) collapses in the visualization of QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:55.<sup>49</sup> Here, the transcendent event of Prophet Jesus’ ascension is domesticated through overtly material imagery: a white staircase rising through clouds and a pair of gigantic physical hands embracing a luminous figure. Such

<sup>47</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath], “The Groups Of People - Heaven Or Hell,” YouTube, November 9, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFt2VMhhH6E&list=PLK1Gapddj-lWV50Fj9onOuYK-yaZlopNp&index=10>.

<sup>48</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath].

<sup>49</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath], “Al Imran Family (Family of Imran) - Soothing Quran Recitation.”

imagery transforms an ineffable metaphysical event into a concrete and familiar visual spectacle. Consequently, both abstract visual vibrations and material replicas function as condensed symbolic icons, revealing the discursive inconsistency of content producers who are caught between preserving the sanctity of sacred texts and conforming to the platform-driven demands of a desacralizing visual media industry.

This conflict between competing models of metaphysical visualization is further emphasized when creators construct representations of hell using abstract imagery while simultaneously incorporating earthly depictions of divine punishment. In the sequence related to QS. al-Wāqī'ah [56]:42,<sup>50</sup> the threat awaiting the companions of the left is conveyed through a non-mimetic visualization consisting of dull brown streaks of light against a pitch-black background. Similarly, abstract flashes of gloomy bluish-green lightning serve as visual signifiers for the “shade of black smoke” described in QS. al-Wāqī'ah [56]:43.<sup>51</sup> This aesthetic strategy, which deliberately avoids depiction earthly objects, collapses entirely when the video encodes the warnings of punishment found in QS. al-Baqarah [2]:7 and 10.<sup>52</sup> Here, the torment of the afterlife is concretized materially through graphic imagery of human hands emerging from flames, closely resembling visual conventions found in popular horror cinema.

This division between mimetic realism and abstract geometric representation ultimately generates a profound aesthetic and affective experience within the viewer's consciousness. The temporal synchronization of non-mimetic fractal visual pulses with the fluctuating frequencies of murattal recitation is perceived by audiences from a dominant-hegemonic position. This reception is exemplified by a comment posted by the account @qurat-ul-\*\*\*akhtar4210: “My daughter was not sleeping. She is 4 months old. I think she was distressed. But your beautiful recitation and voice are healing my daughter, and now she is sleeping peacefully.” Rather than functioning as passive decorative elements, these abstract visual forms are empirically perceived as carriers of sacred presence that activate the performative and curative dimensions of Qur'anic recitation. The psychological calm transmitted through the device screen is thus understood by viewers as producing tangible therapeutic effects. This phenomenon suggests that the digitization of eschatological narratives traps the sacredness of the afterlife within a new media paradox: a space where the meanings of sacred texts remain suspended between doctrinal fidelity and the pragmatic demands of desacralizing visual platforms.

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<sup>50</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath], “The Groups Of People - Heaven Or Hell.”

<sup>51</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath].

<sup>52</sup> The Prophets Path [@theprophetspath], “The Most Heart Touching Recitation of Surah Baqarah.”

The inconsistency between non-mimetic abstraction and material representation reveals a profound crisis of representation within the tradition of digitally mediated eschatological interpretation. When narratives that transcend the boundaries of space and time are subjected to concrete visualization, an ontological reduction occurs, undermining the theological principle of *tanzīh*—the absolute incomparability and transcendence of God and metaphysical realities. Classical Islamic theology carefully safeguards the domain of pure eschatology as a realm of unseen realities whose abstract nature must be accepted through faith, as it lies beyond the limits of human reason.<sup>53</sup> Yet, the insertion of worldly material objects and the adoption of secular cinematic aesthetics into representations of eschatological punishment demonstrate how the boundaries of traditional belief are expanded in pursuit of dramatic visual effects. This process of materialization strips sacred texts of their transformative character, which originally required inward contemplation, and reconfigures them as ordinary visual stimuli that confine the audience's transcendental imagination within fixed material forms.

At a deeper level, this visual ambiguity is shaped by the deterministic nature of digital infrastructures, particularly device screens that require a constant supply of high-resolution, visually concrete imagery. Within the contemporary landscape of mediatization, religious texts are increasingly assessed not by the dialectical depth of their meanings but by them to be translated into visual units compatible with digital cinematic aesthetics.<sup>54</sup> The acceptance of non-mimetic fractal patterns as curative and meditative media demonstrates that, in the era of new media, spoken sacred texts have expanded their performative functions beyond the boundaries of textual interpretation. However, when these functions intersect with the desacralizing logic of platform-based visual culture, the sanctity of the afterlife becomes ensnared in the enduring paradox of digitalization.<sup>55</sup> In this context, the convergence of technological imperatives and cyber-visual representation no longer functions merely as a communicative aid; instead, it emerges as a new apparatus that compels transcendent texts to negotiate pragmatically with the attention economy of digital space.

This division of visual style between fractal abstraction and concrete materialization illustrates that cyberspace function through a regime of representational ambivalence, striving to balance doctrinal adherence with the aesthetic demands of digital screens. When theological boundaries dissolve into mimetic cinematic effects to meet the

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<sup>53</sup> 'Alī bin Ismā'īl Al-Asy'arī, *Al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl Al-Diyānah* (al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-Faḍīlah, 2011), 440.

<sup>54</sup> Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*, 80.

platform's requirement for high-resolution imagery, the production process effectively engages in a form of pragmatic theological compromise, ensuring that eschatological narratives remain visually compelling.<sup>56</sup> Audience responses to the calming effects of audiovisual synchronization further serve as mechanisms that sustain this circuit.<sup>57</sup> Such performative-curative testimonies suggest that technological homogenization has successfully generated a new aura of sacredness capable of continuously capturing and maintaining viewers' attention. Consequently, this visual duality operates as an adaptive strategy through which the cyber da'wah industry translates supernatural realities into forms familiar to popular digital culture, while simultaneously preserving the continuity of the digital broadcasting circuit without provoking radical doctrinal resistance.

These findings reveal the presence of internal resistance within content production. Cyber producers have not fully succumbed to the logic of media secularization; instead, they continue to navigate its pressures by employing non-mimetic fractal aesthetics aimed at preserving the sacred essence of the text. While previous studies have often interpreted the incorporation of fictional, fantasy, or horror-inspired cinematic effects into religious content as evidence of complete desacralization,<sup>58</sup> the performative-curative reception expressed in audience comments complicates this assumption. The interaction between digital audiences and cyber producers demonstrates how technological ambiguity can be harnessed to generate alternative forms of spirituality that are experienced as both emotionally and physically real. This feedback loop suggests that cyberspace does not merely diminish or secularize the supernatural; rather, it reconstructs the ways in which contemporary urban publics encounter, experience, and authenticate the presence of the transcendent.

## Conclusion

The visualization of religious texts in digital spaces challenges a long-standing assumption within mediatization scholarship that digital media primarily function as emancipatory environments that decentralize religious authority and destabilize textual

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<sup>56</sup> Ruth Tsuria, "Digital Media: When God Becomes Everybody—The Blurring of Sacred and Profane," *Religions* 12, no. 2 (February 8, 2021): 110, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020110>.

<sup>57</sup> Al-Zaman, "Social Mediatization of Religion: Islamic Videos on YouTube."

<sup>58</sup> Dhama Suroyya, "Commodification and Desacralization of Religious Symbols in Indonesian Horror Movies," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Communication* 5, no. 1 (April 1, 2022): 15–38, <https://doi.org/10.35719/IJIC.V5I1.1816>; Yohana Debby, Theresia Intan Putri Hartiana, and Nanang Krisdinanto, "Desakralisasi Film Horor Indonesia Dalam Kajian Reception Analysis," *ProTVF* 4, no. 1 (March 17, 2020): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.24198/ptvf.v4i1.24171>.

meaning. The findings of this study suggest otherwise. The digitization of Qur'anic verses on the @TheProphetsPath account operates as a new disciplinary apparatus that enforces a structured and systematic regime of meaning closure. Through the domestication of biological anatomy, the hegemonic project of "visual Arabization," and the polarization of cinematic binaries, cyber producers construct banal religion not as a random manifestation of superficial religiosity but as a deliberate strategy of discursive stabilization designed to mechanically generate doctrinal certainty. Audience responses—whether expressed through performative-curative testimonies or experiences of inner emotional tension in the comment section—function as latent feedback mechanisms that reinforce and sustain this emerging visual orthodoxy. In this sense, cyberspace has succeeded in transforming the semantic elasticity of revelation into a stable optical dogma adapted to the visual logic of digital screens.

The ability to uncover these layers of latent meaning demonstrates the effectiveness of integrating structuralist visual semiotics with cyber reception analysis. This methodological convergence is particularly useful for revealing how cinematic temporal manipulations at the production level (encoding) are symmetrically connected to processes of psychological confirmation processes at the reception level (decoding). Nevertheless, this study remains subject to significant spatial and cultural limitations. Its analysis is confined to a single global digital da'wah channel with a specific audience profile and therefore cannot fully account for how alternative platforms, operating under different algorithmic architectures, mediate the hybridity of local Islamic expressions. Future research should therefore pursue comparative investigations across platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels, while also examining the agency of local content producers in peripheral contexts. Such an approach would enable assessment of the extent to which this emerging cyber visual orthodoxy remains resilient across diverse digital environments or, alternatively, becomes fragmented when confronted with more resistant forms of local cultural particularity.

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**Data Availability Statement:**

The authors ensure that the datasets necessary to replicate the conclusions of this work are presented in their entirety within the article [and/or] its supplementary information.

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The author(s) declare no conflict of interest. The research was conducted independently of any commercial or financial relationships with the media organizations or platforms analyzed in this study.

**Ethical Approval:**

This study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines for internet research. Since the research exclusively utilized publicly available digital data from YouTube—comprising open-access audiovisual content and publicly posted user comments—it did not require formal institutional review board (IRB) approval. To ensure confidentiality and protect privacy, all user comments were anonymized, and any personally identifiable information (PII), such as usernames and profile details, was completely removed from the research corpus prior to analysis. No human subjects were directly intervened with or deceived during the data collection process.

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